Shortcuts to Fashion

By GINNIE BEARDSLEY

BUILD YOUR OWN FORM

LONG BEFORE the first cuckoo, robin, or daffodil, comes the first indication that you absolutely haven't a thing to wear.

One answer to this ever-recurring tragedy is to brush up on the sewing you learned as a youngster, and huild yourself a dress form. The two go together. Without a dress form, you can sew until your eyes are bloodshot and your fingers look like pin cushions, and fail to achieve anything you'd be caught cleaning the stove in.

Of course, you can buy professional dress forms, but they tend to be expensive, especially if your figure has a tendency to fluctuate in weight.

The answer is: Do it yourself. Or rather, con a friend into doing it for you. For something under two dollars, you can buy several miles of gummed brown paper tape, together with a piece of lightweight, tubular jersey about the length of a bathing suit.

You choose an afternoon or evening when you are quite unlikely to be disturbed. (Three vacuum cleaner salesmen, the Fuller brush man, a fly-by-night home-improvement promoter, a cosmetic representative, and two people with sensational opportunities in magazine subscriptions will instinctively steer a path to your door; buf you didn't invite them, and if you come to the door in your brown paper tape, you'll scare them so they'll run two blocks without stopping, anyway).

You follow the simple directions on the package, which is to say cut about 40 strips of tape to about half your girth at the widest point, and most of the rest into one-foot lengths. You strip to your foundations (OK, so you don't wear any; you're on your own, but see that you hold your tummy in).

You attire yourself tastefully in your jersey tube, and your long suffering friend starts to plaster the tape on.

You pick a stance you can hold because you're going to have to hold it for a long time. (You know perfectly well you never stand with your shoulders thrown back like an advertisement for a military school, so don't be silly!) Your friend dips the tape strips, one at a time, into the pan of water you've provided, and pastes them horizontally around you.

When she's covered your jersey toga in such a way that you're a brown paper package from shoulders to thighs, you stop for something cool to drink. But if you think you can rest, you're wrong. Your friend hands you the glass, and you drink quietly without moving anything but your right arm. (So you're left handed—don't bring your troubles to me).

Moistened, but not exactly rested, you carry on. Your friend criss-crosses all the one-foot tapes on you at varying angles, building up a good, stiff, consistent crust. Time crawls on. Your left hip itches, and you have a dragged down sensation in the small of your back. Your friend is complaining of cramps in her legs, so you stop for another refresher.

You haven't thought about the hour, but are jolted into being aware of it when your respective husbands come in quietly and start to howl at the sight of you in a brown paper bathing suit. Spurred on but not helped by wisecracks from the male contingent, you retire to be cut out of your cast, finally. When it's pasted back together, your loving spouse and his stalwart pal remark critically, "Your figure looks better than that, doesn't it?"

Only the thought of how much work it would be to make another dress form keeps you from heaving your shell at these tormentors, so you compromise on another drink.

When the apparition dries, you varnish it, pad it inside, and prepare to put it on a revolving base so it can be turned around as you fit clothes on it.

You thought this was going to be easy, didn't you? You expected to go into any second-hand store and have the proprietor practically beg you to take away some of the old piano stools that were cluttering up the place. How wrong you were! There's not a piano stool in sight. People have made them all into bird baths, planters, lamps or TV stands. You finally locate a mouldy old swivel chair, which the proprietor of the store evidently thinks is an original Chippendale. Strong argument brings the price down a little. You carry off your prize, mount your dress form on a broomstick, then on the base of the swivel chair, and you're all set, with your own little salon, all ready to turn out creations that will be the envy of Paris—Paris, Iowa (population 11), that is.

Unorthodox Mayhem

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pletion of the new wooden lock-up and courthouse, 22 by 26 feet.

"The first occupant," he wrote, "was Big George, the Indian who was arrested by Const. Miller on suspicion of having drowned his wife. George is noted in this part of the country for his big feet. When done up in colored cloth these appendages might easily be mistaken for canvassed hams. When it became known that George was going to jail the people of this village manifested a lively curiosity to see what would be done with his feet, as it was commonly believed they couldn't get through the prison door. I am informed, however, that the feat was successfully accomplished and they do not hang out the door as some people suppose."

Trick of the rural correspondent was his habit of switching in abrupt conclusion to a major or minor occurrence. Here's an example from Nugget reporting from Barkerville: "Dan McDonald is the proud owner of a new mower, the first seen this far north. Yesterday half the town burned down . . . no one was injured."

WHEN A SOUTHBOUND STEAMER, the Eureka, stopped at Nanaimo on the way from Alaska in the '80s, the skipper gave The Free Press a story from Harrisburg, Alaska. Seems two saloon keepers, Rennie and Martin, got drunk, and while thus engaged an Indian stole a bottle of whisky from them. When Rennie sobered up he sought redress with a bung starter, but got clubbed to death for his pains.

Two Indian suspects, with another who resisted arrest, were locked up. They got hold of a pistol, shot their guard, and escaped to a house nearby.

A Major Givens crashed the door and he was shot dead. Then two of the Indians headed for the woods. One was shot by citizens and another dragged out of the house and lynched. Next day the local Indian chief handed over the third man, who was promptly hanged. This, condensed in a dozen lines of type, concluded with "thus ended the tragedy which began with a bottle of whisky and cost six lives. The placer diggings are said to be turning out well."

See what I mean? Once in the doldrums between stories an interior editor soliloquized: "The foreign news this week has been flat as ditchwater . . . even earthquakes are more quiet than usual."

Of all the country editors who gathered split firewood, set type, swept the office and on occasions delivered their own papers, most original character was undoubtedly bearded, bibulous and bawdy "Colonel" R. T. ("Bob") Lowery. He hailed from Petrolia, Ontario, and ran a succession of mining camp newspapers around the Kootenay, at the turn of the century. In keeping with the mineral theme his papers were always styled the "Ledge", or the "Float" or the "Claim", and his town news column was always headed by the figures of that day's price for metal. He published in New Denver, Nelson, Kaslo, Fernie and many other points.

Professed agnostic (and admirer of Bob Ingersoll), Lowery was by turn cynical and satirical and humorous . . . and often vulgar. One of his ventures during a chequered career was "Lowery's Claim," the B.C. answer to Bob Edward's Calgary "Eyeopener." Obviously slanted to the barroom trade, Kootenay miners revelled in the Loweryisms.

Once in the New Denver "Float," recounting the early history of Nelson, he wrote, "In '89 Anderson wanted to call the town Saulsbury while Ward and four others wanted it to be Lakeview. Sproat settled the dispute by calling it Nelson. He also named all the streets in Nelson but called nine of them Whisky and Soda."

Lowery had a convenient trick of applying mining terms to everyday eevnts and reporting an accident near New Denver said. "Col. Topping stooped at the creek to get a drink, when his .44 fell out of his holster and opened a cross cut in his arm. Serve him right for not drinking out the bottle like the rest of us. . . ."

IN THE SAME STYLE he reported, "A parson is in town prospecting for a site for a church," and once he remarked "when my last paper went down the flume it nearly took me with it."

When he wrote of a violent storm which whipped a nearby lake, smashed trees and nearly pulled his newspaper office apart, he said, "even my bulldog howled, while the mice, who have been stealing my paper all summer, came out of their holes with tears in their eyes to beg forgiveness."

I don't know whether he did have a bulldog, but he often mentioned it. It was kept in the ofifce "to attack churchgoers and delinquent subscribers.!"

Of Rossland's vice (and town lighting) he once remarked "at night the place looks like an overcrowded switching yard," and about the CPR he editorialized, "The CPR is a wonderfully safe road and seldom kills a passenger, although occasionally someone dies of heart failure when he reads the freight rates."

There's an O. Henry flavor to his report of a homecoming: "I reached Nelson just as the policemen were rubbing their eyes and the rumble of the presses told me that the two Daily Losers were about to flood the city with intelligence." And his description of a newspaper friend " . . . he was an old printer who'd taken '30' off the booze hook, his manner a mixture of depressed mentality and alcoholic expectancy."

Of Kaslo in the '90s he wrote nostalgically, "No keys were used by saloons and prosperity was so thick several hoboes died from gluttony."

Except for a side venture in Goldfields, Nevada, Bob Lowery lived and died a B.C. newspaperman. He ran the Lardeau Claim until the press of creditors "threatened to take the door off its hinges" and finally printed the last edition on brown wrapping paper. Which makes it a collector's item. After that he bobbed up again with the Kaslo Claim and when it, too, folded (after a brief life of 16 weeks) he had a field day with the final edition. Half the ads were upside down, some were sideways and a few right side up.

On the front page was a memorial tablet topped by his farewell message, "Busted by Gosh!"

After that he ran a paper in Fernie for about nine months, and in the only copy I managed to find my eye caught the phrase "Fred Fork, our mayor, whom I met on the street today, is getting to look more and more like a tub of lard . . ." It was Lowery all right.

It was after this that he ran Lowery's Claim for a couple of years (1901-2) in New Denver, then it changed location to Vancouver (1903) for a few months, and finally moved back to Nelson from the fall of 1905 to the fall of 1906. By this time old Bob, like a Don Quixote tilting with a pen instead of a lance, was tilting much too often at his arch enemy, religion. Fact was he'd ceased to be funny; instead was getting tiresome. The clergy represented their views to Ottawa, and the postmaster-general lowered the boom. In 1906 Lowery was forbidden the mails.

"Blasphemous and ribald," were the terms applied, and like Pearl White's friend, Harry, "who had been resourceful in the past" it was the final episode for Robert T. Lowery.

It was Ibsen who once wrote, "Whenever I take up a newspaper and read it, I fancy I see ghosts creeping between the lines." Of course, there are ghosts in our old papers; ghosts of people like De Cosmos, Higgins, Benny Nichols and a host of others. Ghosts of "Our Yale Correspondent" and, of course, . . . Bob Lowery.